# ELIMINATING STIGMA THROUGH MINDFUL COMMUNICATION

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### Objective

Public health and health care providers can use mindful communication tools to eliminate stigma in their everyday interaction with clients and ultimately, improve the health outcomes of people living with HIV.

Mindful communication is about recognizing power dynamics.

Breaking down power dynamics is the clinician's professional responsibility

## How stigmatizing language works

Stigmatizing communication attacks the victim's identity

A broken identity limits an individual's sense of personhood

Broken
identities are
perceived as
less worthy and can
be vilified, abused,
mistreated, or
objectified

Stigmatizing attacks are particularly harmful when they go unchallenged

Communication interactions are always enmeshed in both individuals' sense of personhood

## Barriers faced by people living with HIV



"I was refused care because of my identity/HIV status"

"Will I be able to find health professionals who are adequately trained?"

"I can't seem to find competent services for people like me"

Two thirds of people living with HIV report experiencing one of the following forms of discrimination from health care providers:

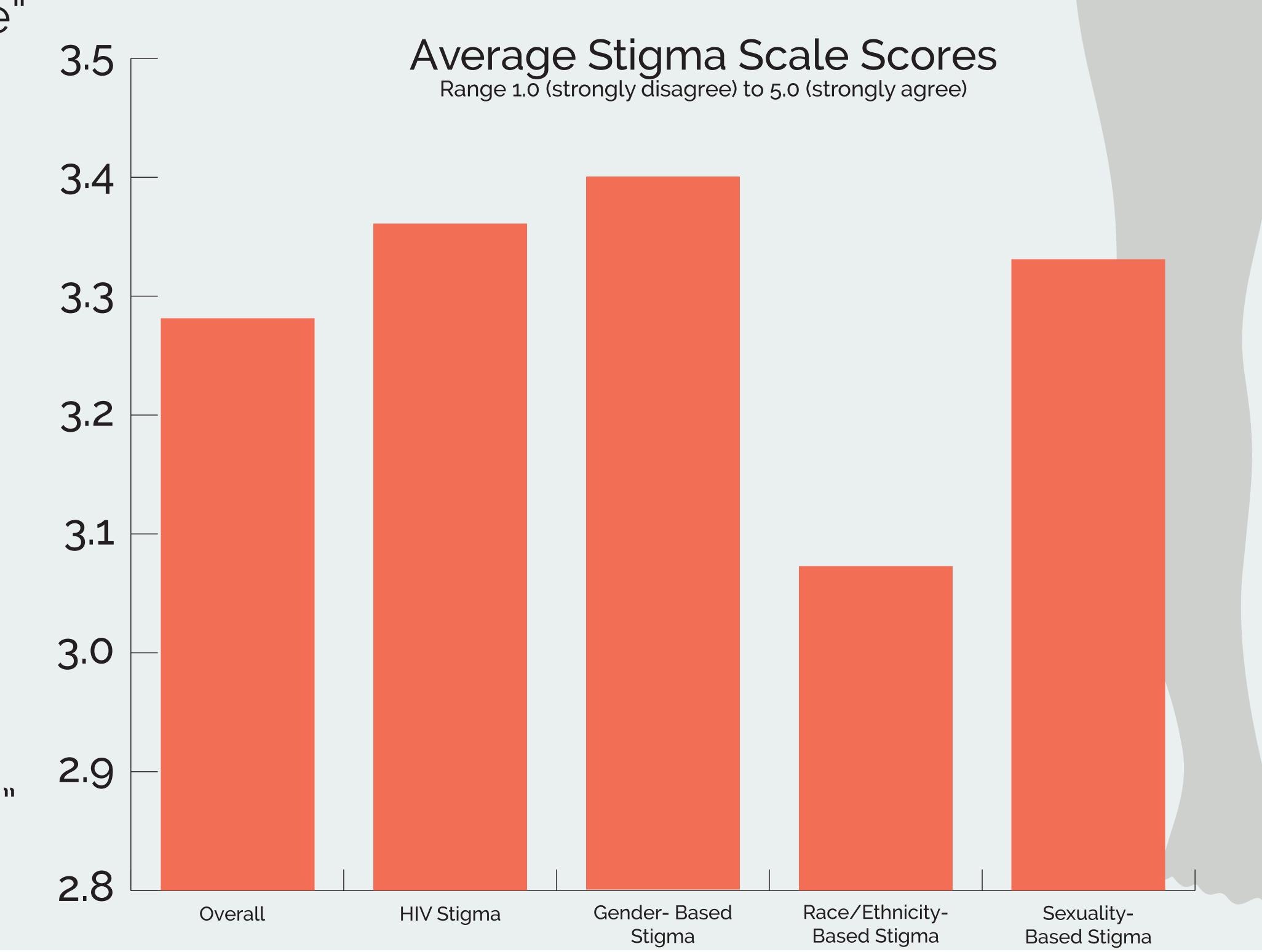


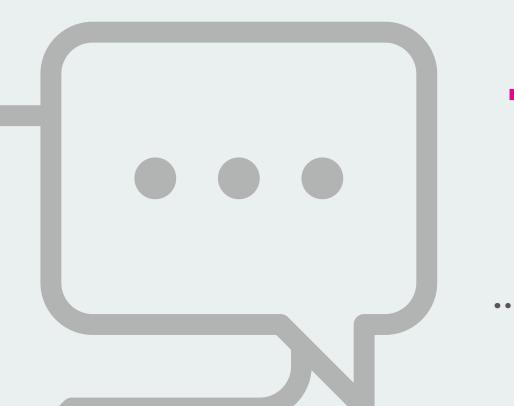
"The clinician blamed me for my condition"

"The provider was physically rough/abusive"

"The provider used harsh language"

"The provider treated me differently because of who I am" (Lambda Legal)





### Tips and Tools

- Use people-first language to acknowledge the client's personhood
- Put the "living" in "people living with HIV"
- Recognize the unique perspectives of women and men of color living with HIV
- There are facts and fictions about HIV; choose facts
- Talk about HIV disclosure as the complicated issue that it is

(Positive Women's Network - USA)

- Examine perceived concerns to understand their importance for the patient
- Recognize existing fears, assumptions and unrealistic expectations (from all sides)
- Acknowledge desires, life goals, and strengths as part of health and wellness
- Establish communication ground rules
- Be proactive in initiating mindful interactions with patients

#### A NOTE ON METHODS AND REFERENCES

- Addressing Stigma: A Blueprint for Improving HIV/STD Prevention and Care Outcomes for Black & Latino Gay Men (National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors and National Coalition of STD Directors, 2014) Available at: nastad.org/sites/default/files/NASTAD-NCSD-Report-Addressing-Stigma-May-2014.pdf
- Five Things Media Makers Can Do NOW to Stand Up to HIV Stigma (Positive Women's Network-USA, 2015) Available at: pwnusa.wordpress.com/media/five-things-stand-up-to-hiv-stigma
- When Health Care Isn't Caring: Lambda Legal's Survey of Discrimination Against LGBT People and People with HIV (New York: Lambda Legal, 2010). Available at: www.lambdalegal.org/health-carereport